

Former chief of staff to WeWork founder claims discrimination

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Adam Neumann's former chief of staff has accused [WeWork](#) and its co-founder of discriminating against women, claiming that a freewheeling culture of drink and drugs created a "sexually aggressive" work environment at the New York co-working company.

Medina Bardhi, who worked with Mr Neumann at an earlier start-up and joined WeWork as his chief of staff in 2014, has asked the US Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, a federal agency, to bring a class action against the company on the behalf of herself and "similarly situated female employees".

Ms Bardhi said in a complaint filed with the EEOC that she was terminated on October 2 this year — the week after Mr Neumann ceded his role as chief executive — having raised concerns that she had been replaced as chief of staff by a man while on maternity leave and not given her former job back when she returned.

A company spokeswoman said: "WeWork intends to vigorously defend itself against this claim. We have zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind. We are committed to moving the company forward and building a company and culture that our employees can be proud of." A spokeswoman for Mr Neumann referred questions to the company.

The "charge of discrimination" filed by Ms Bardhi's lawyers follows a lawsuit filed in New York State supreme court by Lisa Bridges, a former senior vice-president at WeWork, alleging "glaring" pay disparities, which the company also disputes.

Ms Bardhi alleges that she told Mr Neumann early in her first pregnancy in 2016 that she could no longer accompany him on trips, "particularly due to his penchant for [smoking] marijuana on chartered flights". Later that year the company hired a man as chief of staff on more than double her salary, she alleges.

The claims come as WeWork employees are bracing for up to 4,000 cuts to their 14,000-strong ranks after the company's failed attempt to go public this summer left it scrambling for a [rescue package](#), which it secured from SoftBank last week.